Stone responds to criticism of his 'JFK' movie

New Orleans

Rosemary James' attack on my forthcoming film "JFK" (Letters, June 20) is riddled with factual errors and reveals a mind-set hopelessly stuck in the late 1960s.

Instead of focusing on the key issue about the John F. Kennedy assassination that confronts America today — the government's continuing cover-up of the truth — James gets bogged down in rehashing Jim Garrison's prosecution of Clay Shaw.

James complains that Shaw was prosecuted with a "fraudulent case" and that Garrison's witnesses were "lunatic publicity hounds." The truth is that the prosecution was sabotaged by the federal government from day one.

Every one of Garrison's attempts to extradite key witnesses from other states was rejected. His requests for important evidence such as X-rays and photos of the president's autopsy and tax records and intelligence files on Lee Harvey Oswald were denied.

His office phones were tapped, and he and his staff were followed everywhere by FBI agents. Key witnesses were bribed or died under mysterious circumstances. And all the district attorney's files were stolen and turned over to Shaw's defense counsel before the trial began.

Who, then, did not receive a fair trial — Shaw or the state?

Sadly, James seems unable to grasp that "JFK" is not the Jim Garrison story or the Clay Shaw story. It is the film exploring who killed Kennedy and why.

James incorrectly asserted that I bought "Jim Garrison's fictional script," implying that "JFK" merely regurgitates Garrison's 1969 investigation. The truth is that the script for "JFK" was written by me along with Zachary Sklar. It is based on Garrison's book "On the Trail of the Assassins," Jim Marrs' book "Crossfire" and the separate investigations of nearly a dozen researchers and scholars.

It incorporates a great deal of information that was not known in 1969 when Clay Shaw was tried, including the fact that Shaw was employed by the CIA.

James' misunderstandings about the script stem from her reliance on an inaccurate account published in The Washington Post by George Lardner, whom James described as a "respected journalist." Respected by whom?

Lardner's diatribe against a pirated early draft of "JFK" broke two cardinal rules of responsible journalism: 1. Be fair and let both sides have their say; 2. Review the complete film, not an early draft of the script.

It did not take any "spies," as James stated in her cloak-and-dagger version of reality, to figure out that I considered Lardner's "review" irresponsible. The Washington Post published my lengthy point-by-point refutation of Lardner's errors.

It is particularly irksome that James misquoted me as saying, "The truth is not important." This is a preposterous out-of-context statement, and I have no idea where she came up with it. While I am a dramatic filmmaker and do not purport to be a documentarian, the reason I am making "JFK" is that I want the truth about an event that profoundly changed all our lives to finally come out.

If the government had not lied from the beginning, there would be little need for a film like "JFK." Unfortunately, the government has yet to release crucial evidence in its possession, and we must all try to get to the bottom of the assassination as best we can.

Rosemary James said she believes there was a conspiracy. But what is she doing to further our knowledge? Taking potshots at Garrison and me, calling New Orleans judges and a grand jury of citizens "dupes" and trotting out the timeworn, discredited "Mafia-did-it" theory, this time with the novel twist that Meyer Lansky was running the operation. I'd love to hear her explanation of how Lansky got the Warren Commission and the FBI to cover up for him.

Perhaps James' most peculiar fear is that "JFK" could subject New Orleans to "national ridicule." On the contrary, I believe most Americans will view New Orleans favorably as the one city in the country that had a district attorney, judges and grand jurors with the guts to stand and fight for the truth about President Kennedy's murder.

Oliver Stone

And the Beat Goes On.